



Dr. Robert Thompson

President, Music Sales Group

DR. ROBERT THOMPSON'S career in the music industry has been a long and winding road that began with him in the spotlight. Starting out as a performing artist, he studied trumpet at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, going on to tour with major artists from the Moody Blues to Frank Sinatra before he discovered his true ambition: live concert production. Today, Thompson presides over Music Sales Group (MSG), where he represents, produces, and publishes a wide range of award-winning artists and composers in classical, film, theatrical, and commercial music. As a music publisher, Thompson actively fulfills his passion for production. With the help of a creative global team and an expansive network of music industry professionals, he oversees the production of live concerts, theatrical performances, film/TV productions, and more. Now outside of the spotlight, he creates opportunities for MSG's artists to have their music heard.

MA!: TELL US ABOUT YOUR EDUCATION AND BACKGROUND IN MUSIC.

RT: I started playing trumpet when I was eight years old. It was a very empowering moment for a shy, introverted kid from a small town! I had a marvelous teacher in high school, Ray Crisara, who was an incredible trumpet player in New York City. Through him, I learned that it didn't matter what genre of music you played, be it classical, jazz, rock, or reggae. Fast forward: I earned my master's and doctorate from the Eastman School of Music. I then started performing and touring [while working off and on] as a college professor.

MA!: HOW DID YOUR BACKGROUND PREPARE YOU FOR WHAT YOU'RE DOING NOW?

RT: If I had to point to one single moment, it was my experience studying at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY. It was one of the few programs back then where you could complete two separate master's degrees in classical and jazz simultaneously. The faculty was incredibly supportive and inspiring, and encouraged me to explore the boundaries of what being a musician meant in my life.

MA!: HOW DID YOU BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN THE BUSINESS SIDE OF THINGS?

RT: I had been performing professionally for almost fifteen years when I had the opportunity to move to Europe. I've always been curious and a bit of a risk-taker career-wise, so I moved to Vienna, and started working with [the music publishing firm, Universal Edition.] First it was with classical composers, then it expanded into producing albums and concerts in all areas of music. There was something that resonated deeply with me as a live concert producer—standing off-stage and not having the spotlight on me, yet contributing to everything that was happening on stage. It's now my favorite place: behind the curtain, knowing that I helped make it happen.

MA!: WHAT DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

RT: The global team at the Music Sales Group is the most creative group of folks with whom I've worked. Since I joined, Stewart Copeland (from the Police) composed a new orchestral film score, Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones composed an opera, and film composer Jeff Beal turned the music he wrote for Netflix's *House of Cards* into a full evening concert at the Kennedy Center, to name just a few highlights.

MA!: WHAT WOULD YOUR ADVICE BE TO A YOUNG PERSON INTERESTED IN PURSUING A CAREER IN MUSIC?

RT: [Know that] failure is nothing but an opportunity dressed in very poor clothing. I've kept a journal of professional failures in my career since I left high school: the school I didn't get into, the gig I didn't get, the job I lost. Without exception, every one of those failures was a blessing in disguise. Finally, the innovations that will happen in music in the next twenty years won't happen because of veteran music industry executives like me. They'll happen because of young musicians like you who are reading this article. You're already on the precipice of envisioning a musical world that I can't even fathom. Embrace that! 🎵

PHOTO: JESSICA LEHRMAN

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